No. 26

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"I am leaving my babies in your charge, Miss Desmond," he said, his voice just above a whisper. "I know you'll give them a mother's care."

R. of M. G., No. 26.

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RUTH GORDON had indeed saved the life of her lover, Guy Fillmore by felling the outlaw with a club. Guy Fillmore now had the outlaws at his mercy, and immediately took advantage of the situation.

"Now get up and put your hands up," Guy addressed the outlaw. "And keep them up. You missed me, but I won't miss you."

While the man struggled to his feet, something entirely unexpected happened.

The front door swung open and two men entered. Both of them were heavily armed. For an instant only they viewed the scene before them, and then came the terse order:

"Up with your hands, you fellows, and make it fast." The game is up, for we've got you surrounded!"

Fillmore was about to utter a protest, but Ruth beat him to it.

"But, we are not——" she began, when the speaker cut her short.

"You, too, young woman," he exclaimed. "Some class to you, but just the same you are included."

"I am sure you will allow us to explain," Fillmore broke in.

"Explain to the judge," suggested the other. "It is his business to listen to explanations. Our business is to round up fellows like you, and believe me, you'll get the limit."

At that Guy Fillmore waxed ironical.

"Doubtless you hope to go far in your chosen profession, my friend," he commented. "But I have fears for you. You give indication of being very much handicapped by a gross lack of discernment."

"Educated chap, aren't you?" the officer sneered. "I suppose you are the king of hi-jackers."

"I am neither the king nor the knave," Guy responded. "But if you will be kind enough to give me a chance to explain how we happened to be here, I am sure I could——"

The other did not wait to hear the rest. He turned and called over his shoulders:

"There are four of them right here in the hallway, chief. It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to come in and look them over. One of the gang is a mighty fine-looking young girl.

A few moments later the chief came in. He glanced about and grinned.

"You must have had considerable of a family quarrel," he said. "Why you knocked one of your gang cold." He was looking at the still unconscious figure on the floor. "Why, you boys ought to know better than to fight among yourselves, and," his eyes rested on Ruth Gordon, "especially with a young lady present."

"I agree with you," Fillmore replied. "It was in bad taste."

The chief was apparently not satisfied with his discovery.

"Where is the big fellow?" he demanded. "He is the one I want most particularly."

"Excuse me," said Guy meekly. "But if you'll look into the living room perhaps you will find him. I had him all tied up and ready to ship and was about to get these friends of his done up too when your men interrupted."

The officer in charge eyed the speaker.

"What is this you are giving me?" he demanded. "Where do you fit in? I don't place you."

"Considering your profession, I consider that a compliment," Fillmore assured him. "As to where I fit in—did you notice two cars out there in the road?"

"You bet I did," came back promptly. "That is what tipped us off. You know, we have been looking for this place for a long time. And I'll say you fellows travel in style. You don't have to go around in cheap automobiles."

Ruth Gordon, who had been a very much interested listener to this exchange of words stepped up to the chief.

"You look like a gentleman," she said sweetly. "I am sorry you are so hard to convince that you made a mistake. But if you will go out and look both of those cars over you will find that one of them belongs to Mr. Guy Fillmore, a resident of Bar Harbor.

"The other is the property of Miss Olive Bentley, also living at the same place. I happen to be Miss Bentley's guest and close personal friend. She gave me permission to use her car whenever I want to."

The man looked her over carefully, but he still remained doubtful.

"The registration cards of the cars can be found in a pocket to the left front," Ruth went on. "And if that is not sufficient proof——"

"Mine is in the right front pocket," Guy Fillmore interrupted. "And I would like to introduce this young lady to you, chief," he added, turning to the latter. "She is Miss Ruth Gordon of Chicago, a close personal friend of Miss Olive Bentley. Won't you be kind enough to permit her to lower her hands?"

The chief was evidently a wary officer. He drew one of his men aside and engaged him in a whispered conversation.

"You can lower your hands," he addressed Ruth. "But you," facing Guy Fillmore, "keep yours up. I don't know what to make of this thing. What the girl has been telling may be true, but I want to be sure.

"I am sending one of my men to look over those two cars out there, and he is also going to get Miss Olive Bentley at Bar Harbor on the phone. If she——"

"No—no!" cried Ruth in a tone of fright. "She must not know what a horrible fix I am in."

At this the chief laughed.

"Alright," he acquiesced. "Go ahead, Hank. Have a look at those cars and hurry back. Never mind the telephoning."

Within a few minutes the man returned and reported that he had found the registration cards properly signed in the pockets described.

With an exclamation of partly surprise and partly disgust. the chief spoke to Fillmore.

"I wish you would tell me how you happened into this hole," he said. "Was it by accident or was it——"

"Purely by accident," Guy interrupted, and he related in detail how he and Ruth Gordon met and what transpired afterward. "Through my assinine stupidity I placed her in a perilous position," he ended. "And I don't know what would have happened if she had not tapped this fellow here on the head. She saved my life and saved herself from a fate worse than death."

Every word the young man uttered conveyed sincerity and truth. What little doubt still remained in the chief's mind, was speedily removed.

"Miss Gordon and you, Mr. Fillmore, my men and I owe you an opology," he declared. "Now let us have a look at the big fellow in the next room."

The three entered the living room while several of the officers remained in the hall to keep the two outlaws covered with their guns.

The chief had hardly laid eyes on the gigantic prostrate figure when he let out a gasp of amazement.

"Good lord, that is the fellow we have been after

for some time," he exclaimed. "There is a reward of a thousand dollars on his head."

"What is he wanted for?" Fillmore inquired.

"Oh, murder and a few things like that," was the answer.

"Well," said Guy, "you can have him and the reward in exchange for a favor I am going to ask of you."

"And what is that, Mr. Fillmore?"

"You made an apology for the treatment we suffered at your hands." the latter retorted. "But that is not quite enough. Then there is that thousand dollars reward to be considered. Send one of your men to procure a marriage license and a minister——"

"Guy!" cried Ruth Gordon. "You are mad."

"Very likely I am," the young man returned very quietly, but with cool determination. "But this must be done. What difference does it make whether we are married now or later? It is bound to happen."

There were a good many other things Fillmore would liked to have added, but the chief's presence prevented it.

But he did take the girl in his arms right then and there. What he whispered in her ears caused her to nod her pretty head.

"Alright!" agreed the chief. "I'll get the license and the preacher for you two youngsters. But I want to witness the marriage ceremony and I must be permitted to kiss the bride."

Ruth Gordon blushed charmingly and shot a glance at her lover.

"But—but what will Olive say?" she murmured, ignoring the request made by the officer.

"I'll assume every responsibility," Guy responded cheerfully. "When you meet Miss Bentley again it will be as my wife, and I, your lawfully wedded husband, will

have the exclusive right to defend you against the world."

While one of the officers left in quest of a marriage license and a minster of the gospel, the others made sure of the outlaws.

They were securely handcuffed and then locked in one of the upstairs rooms.

Ruth Gordon and Guy Fillmore looked on and occasionally exchanged a few words of banter with the chief. These three were in a most happy frame of mind, and for widely different reasons.

Chapter 83

DR. VAN BUREN

IT WAS the morning after Philip Gordon had received the information from Dr. Stanley, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church at Gary, Indiana, that the woman who was buried in the church-ground was not his first wife. What a horrible night he had spent!

Pale and haggard he arose and made a desperate effort to come to some conclusion. After a cold bath he went downstairs, but the very thought of touching food nauseated him.

Tom, the faithful old valet, stood respectfully at a distance and watched his beloved young master with troubled eyes.

All during the day he did not move from Gordon's side, and when night fell again, the latter was close to being a nervous wreck.

Another night of sleeplessness and torture followed. Another morning came, and Phil's mental suffering increased tenfold.

For the first time since his honorable career as a servant in the Gordon household Tom took the initiative in a matter in which his master was chiefly concerned.

He went to the telephone and asked Dr. Van Buren to come at once.

"What is the matter with Mr. Gordon?" the physician wanted to know.

"I can't tell you that," the old valet answered, his voice shaking. "But he needs you as a doctor and a friend both."

Never had Tom spoken truer words. Philip Gordon indeed needed the advice of a loyal friend as well as a remedy for his nerve-wrecking physical condition.

Dr. Van Buren came and at once entered Gordon's bedchamber where the latter lay writhing in his nameless agony. Old Tom remained outside the door, waiting anxiously for the physician to come out.

Ten long minutes passed, then twenty. An hour had gone, and still Dr. Van Buren was with his master.

At last he appeared. Tom, unable to restrain himself any longer, took the physician by the arm and swung him around.

"Is—is Mr. Gordon seriously ill?" he asked somewhat brokenly.

"Not physically," Dr. Van Buren responded, then walked on.

What Philip Gordon had told him was almost beyond belief. Marie, his first wife was alive—at least, she had not perished in that frightful explosion in Gary.

Was the suspicion he had so long nourished, about to be confirmed? Could it be that—that this Marie Desmond was—he dare not complete the thought.

"I must make sure," he muttered to himself as he proceeded through the corridor. "I must go to her at once. If it is as I suspect, I shall know the truth within this hour."

When he reached the door leading to the nursery, he hesitated. He seemed paralyzed and became aware of the violent beating of his heart.

He felt that he was on the threshold of a most momentous discovery. But how could he broach a subject so obviously delicate and almost forbidden?

What right had he to tear open the book which contained the dead past of another? If he asked the governess point blank if she were the first Mrs. Gordon,

she would surely deny it.

Dr. Van Buren realized that this Marie Desmond could have revealed her true identity long ago had she desired to do so.

He realized also what the nature of such a revelation would be. Philip Gordon, he knew, was a man whose already strained nerves would never stand another scandal.

And yet, the physician felt that he had a duty to perform. Summoning all his courage he entered the nursery without knocking.

The very touching scene his eyes beheld was not new. The governess sat beside little Harry on his bed, supporting him lovingly while helping him with his reading as she generally did.

Occasionally she stooped and kissed his brow as only a loving mother could have done.

Unobserved Dr. Van Buren stood watching the picture for a long moment, then coughed slightly.

"Oh, doctor!" Marie cried upon perceiving him. "I did not hear you come in."

The physician did not seem to hear her. His eyes were fixed on her face for almost a full minute, then his gaze wandered around the room.

Marie had known Dr. Van Buren ever since she was a young girl, and at one time there had been a slight attachment between them. Later he became the Gordon family physician.

"What — what is the matter, doctor?" she inquired, rather disturbed at his unusual behavior. "Are you worried about something?"

"Yes, I am worried," he admitted, his eyes again fastened on her face. "Mr. Gordon, whom I value highly as a personal friend, is near an utter collapse. He——"

Marie's gasp stopped him. Her features had gone

deathly white, and she was trembling.

"God—I hope he is not seriously ill!" she managed to stammer.

"Not physically," Dr. Van Buren rejoined, still scrutinizing the woman closely. "The trouble is in his mind."

"His mind—is it—is it affected doctor?"

"Rather badly, I am afraid," the latter answered. "A day or two ago he received some news which has shaken him to the very soul. I suppose, Miss Desmond, you know something about Mr. Gordon's family affairs.

"He was married once before to a woman he loved and idolized. They parted in anger and her fate was a tragic one indeed. It was one of the most deplorable affairs that ever came to my notice. Perhaps you have heard something about that."

Marie had sunk upon a chair because her limbs refused to support her. She was staring at the speaker and nodded.

"Yes, I—I heard about that," she breathed.

"Rumor had it at the time that the first Mrs. Gordon was not a good woman," Dr. Van Buren went on, his steady gaze fastened upon Marie's downcast eyes. "Later, through a confession made by a certain man, the facts became known, and the first Mrs. Gordon's absolute innocence was established.

"When poor Phil realized the frightful mistake he made, and how he wronged her, he nearly lost his mind. I never saw a man carry on the way he did. He was utterly beside himself.

"In his bitter remorse he gave orders to have the body of his first wife removed from the place of burial at Gary, so that it might rest in the family vault. To his intense horror, he learned that it was another woman's body that rested there

"The fact that the first Mrs. Gordon was killed in that explosion at the steel plant received a blow. As the matter stands now, Mr. Gordon believes that she is still alive, and he has determined to leave no stone unturned in order to find her.

"While he has no clue as yet, I am of the opinion that the search may end sooner than we anticipate. Mr. Gordon has enlisted the help of one of the best detective agencies in the country."

As he uttered the last words she raised her drooping eyelids and their glances met.

Marie felt instinctively that this man had looked under her mask, and that he knew her to be Marie, the first Mrs. Gordon. With all the strength she could muster, she denied it in that long glance.

She smiled bravely, although her heart was pounding and her ears were singing.

She would rather have died than to admit to Dr. Van Buren the deceit she had been practising. There were too many reasons why she must remain what she was—just Marie Desmond, the governess.

"I really don't care to discuss Mr. Gordon's family affairs," she said with a shrug of her shoulders. "Since you are here, I have a suggestion to make, doctor."

"Indeed?" the latter drawled, amazed at her immense power of will.

"Yes," she went on. "The boy is not at all improving as rapidly as he should. Some time ago you mentioned that a trip to the south would be of great benefit to him. Are still of that opinion?"

"I am," he answered. "The boy is now strong enough physically to stand the trip. But who is to take him? Mr. Gordon couldn't. His one aim in life now is to find his first wife. There is no chance of him being persuaded to take the boy south."

She gave him a long look. And she seemed to be considering before she spoke.

"Perhaps Mr. Gordon would allow me to take both of his children south," she said. "He may rest assured that I shall take the best of care of them. Something really ought to be done in the boy's case. I fear if we keep on waiting, he will never completely recover because of that annoying cough."

Marie's argument was more like a fervent prayer. Her eyes had filled with tears, and Dr. Van Buren turned away.

It was difficult for him to keep the secret he thought he had learned. All that was noble in him spoke loudly in behalf of the suffering mother who was sacrificing herself in holy and unselfish devotion.

"I think I shall speak to Mr. Gordon about the matter at once," he declared and left the room.

As he closed the door behind him, Harry lifted himself upon his arm and beckoned to the governess. The expression on his manly little features was one of childish curiosity.

"What was the doctor talking about?" he inquired, nestling close into the woman's arms. "What did he say about—about my mother?"

Marie swallowed a tear.

"Yes, he talked about your—your mother, dear," she admitted, stifling a sob.

"He said — he said that my mother is not dead, Miss Desmond."

"Yes, you darling boy."

"Is it—is it true?" The boy tried vainly to make the governess meet his anxious gaze. "Is it true?" he asked once more.

Marie could have screamed out loud in the agony of her heart.

How could she discuss this subject with her own boy—her own beloved boy. She held him closer and pressed her lips to his curly head.

"I only know what Dr. Van Buren said," she told him. "But—but," she added softly, "would you like to have your own mother back, Harry?"

"Oh, would I?" His childish voice was filled with joyous anticipation. "You—you don't know what a wonderful mother she was. She was always so sweet and kind. And I never believed the ugly things Nora Evans used to say about her."

Ah, the bitter irony of it all. Here was a mother utterly at the mercy of cruel fate. Her very soul cried out for permission to reveal herself to this loyal son of hers.

But her lips dare not speak. Once again the horror of the situation came back to her, but with renewed force. She must remain a stranger in her own home—a stranger to those she loved dearest on earth.

And yet it had its compensations. As if guided by instinct, Phil had treated her kindly, yes, almost lovingly.

He had learned about her innocence, and he had bitterly regretted the wrong done her.

For the time being Marie's mind had wandered back along the road of happy days gone by. It dwelled only upon the things she wished to remember. Like the real man she always had known Phil to be, he had admitted his wrong.

He had spoken of it to old John Procter, his father-in-law. He had talked about it to Dr. Van Buren.

But as she thought of the latter, she experienced a sudden shock. Why had he looked at her so strangely a few moments ago.

Could it be possible that he had penetrated her

disguise — that he had recognized her in spite of her changed features?

And he had gone to present her suggestion about taking Harry south, to Phil. What answer would he bring her?

Very tenderly and very softly she breathed another kiss on the boy's curly head. She wanted to lay him down, but he insisted upon remaining in her arms.

"You better take a nap now," she urged gently. "My little man must be tired."

"But I am not a bit tired," Harry protested. "I don't know why, but I love it when you hold me so tight."

Marie was about to speak when the door was pushed open. Dr. Van Buren entered briskly, followed by Philip Gordon. The latter's face was painfully white and he was obviously excited.

Chapter 84

BITTER HUMILIATION.

ALICE GORDON had gone to Mark Sperber's reception and dance for the sole purpose of making the personal acquaintance of the man. Of course, his immense wealth was the main attraction. But it was not far ahead of the keen desire to meet all of Hollywood's celebrities bound to be there.

Well, she met them, but her insolence and her rudeness as well as her haughty demeanor, reduced her popularity down to the lowest minimum.

Gloria Marsdon had done more than her part to advertise her beautiful Chicago friend's virtues, but they proved to be a myth.

The people of the screen understood human nature too well. With a few exceptions they learned to dislike Mrs. Gordon as soon as they came in contact with her.

She was quick to notice this, and in her resentment she showed flashes of such an ugly temper which brought forth a wave of general detestation.

Alice's greatest disappointment lay in the fact that Mark Sperber failed to pay her the attention she had expected.

He welcomed her as Gloria Marsdon's friend, made some favorable comment upon her rosy complexion, then proceeded to devote himself to a lovely young flapper of seventeen.

The night was not an exactly pleasant one for the Chicago woman. She learned for one thing, that young bathing beauties still in their "teens" had the call.

They were, for the most part, vain, empty-headed

creatures, who exhibited their charms utterly without shame.

However, there was one bright spot. Richard Courtenay was there, and he made it known at every opportunity that he was more than willing to get back on agreeable terms with Mrs. Gordon.

The latter gave him an inviting smile, and the next moment they were talking like the best of friends.

"You know, you were very cruel to me the other day," he told her, his black eyes looking deeply into hers. "I was never treated that way before by any woman."

"I am sorry," she admitted, a smile playing about her sensual lips. "I have but one excuse to make, my dear Richard. You caught me in a bad mood."

He smiled also as he retorted:

"Are you in better mood to-night?"

She nodded. Just then the orchestra began playing a waltz. It's lilting strains drew them together, and the next moment they were floating over the glazed floor in each other's arms.

The movie star danced divinely. Occasionally he looked down at her.

"Do you know that you are the most beautiful woman here to-night?" he whispered.

Alice did not answer. At least this man appreciated her. His devotion compensated her for the obvious slight suffered at the hands of Mark Sperber, the host.

And after all, what difference did it make if she was merely one of the many to Richard Courtenay. Surely it was something to be wooed by this handsome screen star, whose love affairs were the talk of Hollywood.

"I thought you told me that you were returning to Chicago," he spoke again in that soft, purring tone of his. "I really did not expect to see you here."

"A woman can not always be taken at her word," she said, flashing him a smile.

"I wonder if you have any idea how terribly you hurt me that evening when you invited me to leave." Courtenay went on. "I have learned to love you as I shall never love another woman."

"Did you?" Alice laughed, and pinched his arm.

"Yes, dear. It was like a most wonderful dream, and I am dreaming again now. Ah, if the music would only go on forever." He hugged her tight. "I must see you often. I want to——"

The music stopped and the rest of the sentence was drowned in the storm of handclapping.

Alice was about to give herself again into the man's arms as the orchestra obliged with an encore. She caught a glimpse of Gloria Marsdon, who was making frantic efforts to attract her attention.

"Please, pardon me a moment," she said quickly and left him standing in the middle of the floor.

Gloria Marsdon drew her aside. There was a look of apprehension on her face.

"Why the interruption, old dear?" Alice demanded with same impatience. "Didn't you notice that Richard and I are starting all over again?"

"You bet I did," the other woman replied quickly. "That is why I motioned to you, Alice. If I were you I'd leave Courtenay alone for the rest of the night. If you don't, you'll probably regret it."

Mrs. Gordon's frame stiffened.

"Why?" she asked with more anger than curiosity.

"Nellie Brown just came."

"And who is Nellie Brown, Gloria?"

"She is one of Courtenay's old flames."

"I should worry." Alice shrugged her lovely

shoulders. "She hasn't any more claim on him than I have."

"If rumors speak the truth, she has," the movie actress replied in a guarded tone. "I am told that there was a baby and that our handsome friend was the father of it. Nellie Brown is simply wild about him."

"But he broke with her, didn't he?" Mrs. Gordon suggested.

"Not entirely," came back. "Although she is working at Culvert City, he runs over to see her occasionally."

"The fool!" Alice hissed.

"Which one, my dear?"

"The girl, of course."

Gloria Marsdon nodded her pretty head.

"We are all fools where a handsome man is concerned," she said. "I have made a fool of myself more than once. You are doing it to-night. It would have been better if you had left Courtenay alone instead of flagging him the way you did. You've got him believing now that you are in love with him."

"What if I have?" the other spit out. "You remember what you told me when I came here? You told me that every married woman is entitled to some diversion. Well, this night is my opportunity. I shan't turn Dick down like I did once before."

Alice turned to rejoin Courtenay, but her friend held her back.

"You can't say after a while that I didn't warn you," Gloria murmured urgingly. "If you get into a mess with Nellie Brown, it'll be your own fault. She is a product of the West. She has a nasty way of handling a horse whip, and she can shoot straight."

"I am not in the least worried," snapped Mrs. Gordon.

"Alright, your blood will be on your own head, Alice."

That ended the conversation. The latter at once rejoined Richard Courtenay, and the next minute these two were again sweeping the floor in each other's arms to the tune of another dreamy waltz.

At a table near the main entrance sat Nellie Brown in the company of several other young women.

From time to time she shot a vicious glance at the couple. She had come to the dance in her make-up, consisting of a cowgirl suit with whip and broad-brimmed hat.

A small caliber gun dangled in the holster at her side.

Evidently her companions were urging her on, for her eyes flashed ominously whenever they rested upon the beautiful Chicago woman.

"Don't let her get away with it, Nell," one of them said. "Show her up."

Nellie Brown was a young venus, whose muscles had been slightly over-developed by hard riding on the plains.

Just what her affair with Richard Courtenay had been was never exactly known, for rumors often lie. But she loved him with a fire that nothing could extinguish. He was her man.

"I'll show her up as soon as this dance is over," she drawled.

By a peculiar trick of fate Courtenay and Alice found themselves directly in the center of the floor as the music ceased.

With the swiftness of a drawn gun, Nellie Brown was upon them.

"Say you!" she cried, addressing the woman from Chicago. "If you want to get back home with your skin

whole, you better stay away from him!"

Alice stared at the speaker lazily. Then she laughed.

"How dramatic," she said. "Just like a scene from a play."

"So it is," retorted the cowgirl, cold and white and menacing. "But this is the real thing."

The guests started forward, headed by Mark Sperber.

But it was too late. The very passion of the thing put it between the two women alone. Alice was the taller and evidently well able to take care of herself.

But Nellie Brown had the advantage of being armed with the whip. And she was built like an athlete.

"What are you trying to do, bluff me?" Mrs. Gordon said, her voice quivering with anger. "You evidently don't know who I am. I have a mind to slap you as a lady slaps the face of an impudent servant."

The girl came a step closer.

"Listen," she said in a deadly quiet tone, "if you slap me, God be with you. I'll just naturally break you in two."

Alice looked into those cool, steady eyes. She was not afraid. Anger goaded her on.

"Well, I don't really care to soil my hands on you," she declared rapidly, and shrugged her lovely shoulders. "You are quite insane. I don't know why you should object to me being in Mr. Courtenay's company. Why not let him decide between us."

Richard Courtenay attempted to interfere. Like a flash the girl's hand went to her gun.

"I am dealing with this peacock now, Dick," she said in that same deadly quiet tone. "You better not get mixed up in it."

Courtenay turned away and prevailed upon Mark

Sperber to put a stop to this quarrel. But the host merely laughed. Nothing in the world could have induced him to mar the scene.

His only regret was that he did not have a camera handy. What a realistic picture it would make.

The crowd surrounding them stood motionless. This was a thrill it had not expected.

Nothing could have suited them better than to see this haughty, insolent and overdressed woman from Chicago thoroughly humiliated.

Nellie Brown proceeded to do that very thing.

"They tell me you are married," she drawled, "and that you left your husband at home when you came here. Maybe he was glad to be rid of you. Some men get that way when they have wives like you.

"If you value your complexion, I suggest that you take the first train in the morning and beat it back where you came from. You are not fit to associate with decent people like us. We don't want your kind here in Hollywood."

Alice glanced about the ring of faces. Was there no friend among those guests who would come to her aid?

Instinct told her that she could expect no help from them. Gloria Marsdon, who probably would have taken a hand in the affair, had disappeared.

"I don't care to talk to you," she said with a sneer on her lips. "I know what your kind is capable of."

"No, you don't!" the girl cried, her eyes ablaze. "You don't know a thing about my kind. You have a lot to learn about us, and your first lesson will begin right now!"

The whip was raised and Mrs. Gordon retreated a step.

"Don't you dare strike me!" she shrieked.

An ugly grin passed over the girl's features.

"Whether I will or not depends upon your willingness to comply with a request I am about to make," she said. "I just noticed that one of my shoe laces has become undone. You get down on your knees and tie it."

"I won't!" Alice exclaimed.

"But you will!" was the quiet retort. "And you will do it with all these folk here looking on. Then you can go back to Chicago and tell your fine friends that you had the privilege of doing a favor for a movie actress."

Alice was desperate.

There was no pity in all the eyes curiously focused upon her. She saw only cold determination in those of the cowgirl. And she saw the whip partly raised.

"Oh, yes, you'll do it alright, or I'll cut that face of yours into ribbons," threatened Nellie Brown. "And I won't stop there. I'll put a few marks on those pretty shoulders of yours, and I'll see that your naked back will be covered with adhesive tape for a long time to come."

Pride and anger had gone from Mrs. Gordon. Only fear remained.

She went down slowly, as though crushed by a heavy weight. Her silks and satins dragged in the dust of the floor.

"Now make a good job of it!" cried the cowgirl. "And since you are at it, undo both of the shoe laces and tie them again."

Fumblingly Alice's beautiful hands went to work. A tittering among the guests was plainly heard.

She wanted to scream out loud at thus being humiliated, but what would it avail her? This mad girl was fully capable of carrying out her terrible threat.

A moment later she rose, her face convulsed. And then, as the others laughed, she burst into hysterical

weeping.

Gloria Marsdon appeared and led her gently away. As they went to get their wraps neither said a word. Not until they arrived home did they speak.

"I am leaving for Chicago on the first train in the morning," said Alice, her tears no longer flowing.

"But why the hurry?" the other woman asked.

"You don't suppose I'd be caught on the streets of Hollywood after what happened to-night, do you?" snorted Mrs. Gordon in cold fury.

"What about Richard Courtenay, Alice?"

"I am leaving him in the undisputed possession of Nellie Brown," was Alice's retort.

Chapter 85

IN SUSPENSE.

WHEN Dr. Van Burene entered the nursery with Philip Gordon, Marie received a tremendous shock. She knew that the physician had endeavored to look under her mask and learn her identity. Her first impression was that he had informed Phil of his discovery.

But a swift glance at their faces satisfied her that, for the present at least, all danger had passed.

"Miss Desmond," Gordon began, coming straight to the point, "Dr. Van Buren tells me that you would be willing to take my boy south. Is that correct?"

"Yes," she admitted, coloring slightly.

"Dr. Van Buren also informs me that such a move would benefit Harry's health," Phil continued, his voice a trifle husky. "As a matter of fact I had this matter on my mind for some time. The boy should be taken to a different climate.

"Since I am not in a position to take him myself, I don't know of any one but you capable and trustworthy enough to undertake such an important task. I hope I am not asking too much of you, Miss Desmond."

"I—I thank you for your confidence, Mr. Gordon," she breathed. "I love the boy and——"

"We all know you do," the physician spoke up. "I was just telling Mr. Gordon what a remarkably devoted governess you are. I recommended that the care of both of his children be turned over to you for keeps."

Marie flashed the speaker a quick glance. Their eyes met for a moment, hung on to each other, then she

dropped hers in confusion.

"I am about to begin search for someone who was very near and dear to me," Gordon declared unsteadily. "All of my efforts will be used in that direction. In the meantime I want you to——"

"Oh, I know!" Harry cried jubilantly from his bed. "You are going to find mother."

The governess turned abruptly away and Dr. Van Buren coughed to hide his emotion as Gordon walked over to the boy and pressed him to his breast. It was indeed pathetic to see Harry cling to his father.

"Yes, with God's help I shall find your mother," the latter said quaveringly. "I will never rest until I do. Now, Miss Desmond is going to take you and Phyllis for a nice long trip down south. So you must promise me to be good and obedient."

"Indeed, I will, dad," the boy answered. "And Phyllis will, too."

As Phil wheeled about to address the governess, he found her gone.

In her room, Marie was on her knees, her head bowed in a grateful prayer. Not once had she thought that her existence would be suspected after all the efforts she had made to destroy every evidence.

She could not hold back the tears at this newfound happiness.

Phil took it for granted that she was alive, and she had seen that he gloried in the thought. But unspeakable anguish began to torture her. How long must this horrible deception go on?

Why could she not go to him now and say:

"Your search has ended, dear. Here I am. I am Marie, your first wife. Take me in your arms and love me as you did in the past."

But her lips were sealed. An inexorable fate de-

manded that they remain sealed. What good would it do if she bared her soul so long as another woman called him "husband."

Striving with all her might to compose herself. she returned to the nursery where she found Phil and Dr. Van Buren engaged in an earnest conversation.

"I have decided that you leave at once with the children," the former told her. "I wish you would make the necessary preparations without delay, Miss Desmond. How soon could you be ready?

"In a day or two," she replied, holding herself under perfect control. "The children will need a few things which can be bought in the city."

"Will you take care of that?" Gordon inquired pleadingly.

She gave her assent with a nod.

"I have a charge account at the Marshall-Field department store," he told her. "I suggest that you drive to Chicago and make all the purchases you deem essential for the children and yourself as well. And if you wish, you may take one of the servants with you, preferrably Annie."

Having said this, Gordon turned to the physician, and both left the room.

Alone with the boy, Marie crushed him to her bosom and a tear glistened at her lashes.

When Annie came in a few minutes later with little Phyllis, she immediately informed them of the new turn in affairs.

"And you are going with me, Annie," she ended. "Oh, how glad I am to get away from here for a while. I am afraid I could not live here much longer under existing conditions."

That same night Marie had occasion to speak again to Phil. He had already bought tickets for two

adults and two children.

She was quite composed as he discussed the trip south with her in a matter-of-fact manner. Not even by a flicker of her filmy eyes did she betray the excitement under which she labored.

"I am glad this worry is off my mind," he told her, "for to-morrow I expect to be busy furthering a project which will either mean happiness or worse despair."

Marie could not bear the weary expression on his handsome face. He spoke like a man who was desperate in what seemed certain defeat.

She was glad when he walked away rather abruptly, leaving her to her maze of thoughts and conflicting emotions.

The hour of parting between the father and his children came the following day. A more touching scene Marie had never witnessed.

With both, Harry and Phyllis clinging to him, he made no attempt to control his tears. Again and again he embraced them. And they clung to him as if they were destined to part forever.

At last Phil took the boy's thin face between his hands.

"I pray God that you may return to me strong and healthy," he murmured.

Marie's eyes were streaming with tears. She, the mother was forced to stand by like an utter stranger.

Whether she went away or not, Phil would not miss her. He would think just as much of any other person who was good to his children.

"I am leaving my dear babies in your charge, Miss Desmond," he said, his voice just above a whisper. "I know you will give them a mother's care."

The word "mother" went through her like an electric shock.

"As soon as I know definitely what has become of my—my first wife," he went on, his eyes seeking the floor, "I shall join you and the children in the south. I feel that I need some rest and recreation."

The governess nodded silently. There was a big lump in her throat she vainly endeavored to swallow.

Then suddenly he took hold of her hand and held it very tight.

"You will never know how grateful I am to you, dear Miss Desmond," he told her. "Money could never compensate you sufficiently for what you have done, and still are doing for my children. You may rest assured that I shall welcome an opportunity to discharge my indebtedness to you."

Marie sought for words which would not come. A feeling of intense relief came over her when Phil almost ran from the room.

A few minutes later she boarded the family limousine in the company of Annie and the children.

There was a general waving of hands in the direction of the window at which Phil stood in tears. Then the car started off and the trip to the sunny south had begun.

It had been Gordon's original intention to take the party of four to the railroad station himself. But a pressing business engagement prevented him from carrying out this purpose.

Everyone of his thoughts now was devoted to the finding of his first wife. While he had no clue as yet, his hopes were high.

There was nothing strange about the fact that his second wife was entirely left out of his calculations. Why should he worry about her? No doubt she was having the time of her life in Hollywood.

And he cared little whether she returned or not

The following day Phil was the recipient of two letters. One came from Olive Bentley at Bar Harbor. The other was from his sister and the envelope bore the postmark "New York."

Of the two Ruth's message was the most interesting because it contained the news that she was happily married.

"I know you will never forgive me for having done this without your knowledge and consent, Phil," she wrote. "But I had neither the time nor the inclination to take the chance of being deprived of the man I love so dearly, and who is now my husband.

"Olive Bentley promised me that she would give you all the information you might want regarding Guy Fillmore. If what she tells you about him is not entirely satisfactory, I can only say that she doesn't know how to describe a real man.

"But whether you approve of him or not, we are married, and I love him, so that is that. And, Phil, dear, I do not mean to be disrespectful about this thing. You understand me, don't you?

"Guy has accepted the position of press agent for a New York theatrical syndicate. This means that in all probability New York will be our permanent home. Now, Phil, dear, won't you write to me and wish me happiness?

"Couldn't you come and present this wish in person? I am very anxious to have you meet my husband. If you don't tell me that he is absolutely perfect after you have met him, I shall be ready to jump into the Hudson river."

Gordon could not repress a smile as he finished reading Ruth's letter. It was so like this warm-hearted, impulsive sister of his.

Once more he read what Olive Bentley said about

Guy Fillmore. She not only spoke of him in the highest terms, but she called Ruth the luckiest girl in the world for having captured him.

"Well," he mused, "that is one worry off my mind. This young husband of Ruth's must be a fine fellow if half of what they say about him is true."

He put the two letters in his desk and sat down to answer them. The one he addressed to Olive Bentley was brief and to the point.

He thanked her for the pains she had taken in his sister's behalf, and in conclusion called her a "dear old match-maker."

The one he penned to his sister contained a nice sermon. In order to take the sting off, he enclosed a check for five thousand dollars as wedding present.

Now that this was over, and Ruth married happily, his mind returned to the matter of finding his first wife.

He engaged the best private detective agency in the country and two reliable men were put on the trail.

And the strange thing of it all was that old John Procter, the father of his present wife, insisted upon lending a helping hand. Every day he came to Phil with a new suggestion as to what might be the best method of tracing Marie.

"But what if we find her, dad?" Phil asked him one day as they were again discussing future possibilities in the library. "Won't that place Alice in a rather delicate position? Naturally, I shall do everything I can to regain my freedom so that I can remarry my first wife."

"That is exactly what I want you to do, my boy," the other replied. "Although Alice is my daughter, she has never tried to make you happy or be a wife to you."

Continued in next number

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